

US ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY'S CONSUMER LABELING INITIATIVE

The Consumer Labeling Initiative (CLI) is a voluntary cooperative effort to foster pollution prevention, empower consumer choice, and improve understanding by presenting clear, consistent, and useful safe use, environmental, and health information on household consumer product labels. The CLI was created by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to reach out to consumers, the chemical industry, trade associations, and environmental and public interest groups to determine what information is needed on consumer product labels, and how that information should be presented. It is one of several EPA efforts resulting from the President's goal to "Reinvent Government." The CLI has been highlighted as a prototype for the Agency due to its innovative research process, one that brought together a cross-section of stakeholders and successfully worked to gather input from diverse points of view. The CLI research and policy formulation began with work groups that included EPA, federal and state government staff, representatives from the United States' leading chemical companies, public interest organizations, and other stakeholders. These groups worked together to ensure that the CLI would be as useful as possible and that results could be used productively by everyone involved at the government, industry, and consumer level.

The CLI is a multi-phased pilot project focusing on indoor insecticides, outdoor pesticides, and household hard surface cleaners, some of which are FIFRA certified, meaning that they are registered antimicrobials or disinfectants. Phase I of the project involved a qualitative consumer research study, a review of comments solicited through a notice in the Federal Register, and a literature review of relevant publications and reports of studies. Phase I research findings were categorized into three areas: 1) labeling issues not requiring further validation; 2) labeling issues requiring further development or statistical validation; and 3) education, policy planning, and coordination issues. EPA has already implemented a number of interim label recommendations based on Phase I findings. These include encouraging producers to: print telephone numbers on product labels, use common names instead of formal chemical names, list "Other Ingredients" instead of "Inert Ingredients," and use "First Aid" instead of "Statement of Practical Treatment."

Phase II of the CLI will include quantitative and secondary research, as well as education activities and policy planning and coordination activities. The research study will focus on consumer comprehension, attitudes, behavior, and satisfaction regarding labeling, as well as an evaluation of labeling alternatives. Education activities will be aimed at consumers and will emphasize the importance of reading the label. Through the policy and coordination activities, EPA will investigate issues relating to ingredients, health and safety, and product storage and disposal.

